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OFFICE OF
NATIONAL ESTIMATES

MEMORANDUM

The Indo-Pakistani Crisis: Six Months Later

Secret

22 September 1971

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

22 September 1971

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Indo-Pakistani Crisis: Six Months Later^{1/}

NOTE

Enough has happened since we last published^{2/} to warrant another assessment of the situation in South Asia. In the following we discuss the current situation; likely developments with respect to Pakistan, India, and the Bengali insurgents; the roles of the great powers; the contingency of larger hostilities between India and Pakistan; and possible resolutions of the problem.

^{1/} This memorandum was prepared by the Office of National Estimates and coordinated within CIA.

^{2/} SNIE 32-71, 12 April 1971, Prospects for Pakistan; and Memorandum, 28 May 1971, Indo-Pakistani Tensions. The principal judgments in both remain valid.

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The Insurgency

1. The situation in the subcontinent, and particularly in East Pakistan, has become increasingly tense and volatile. The West Pakistani army and paramilitary security services in East Bengal, now augmented to around 80,000 men, control the cities and parts of the countryside, at least in the daytime. They do have some allies among the populace, notably the 1-2 million non-Bengali Urdu-speaking "Biharis", and some ardently anti-Hindu Bengalis. Many of their supporters have been organized into officially appointed "Peace Committees" which perform some governmental functions.

2. But the military and its allies have not been able to crush an insurgency movement operating throughout much of East Pakistan. Bengali propaganda, such as that from the outlawed Awami League (AL) leaders now in India, alleges that the resistance forces are formidable. Little is known, however, about the real capabilities of the Mukti Bahini (Liberation Fighters, a term frequently used to designate all armed Bengali insurgents, of whatever organization or political persuasion, whether based in East Pakistan or in India). In India there may be as many as 50,000 East Bengalis in some way or another associated with a resistance force. Many if not most of them formerly belonged

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to the pre-March 1971 Pakistani army and to the paramilitary Bengali security service. Perhaps as many as 15,000 cross the border from time to time and carry out guerrilla operations.

3. The larger group that has so far stayed in India may be planning to seize and hold, against Pakistani military counter-attack, a sizable chunk of East Bengali territory in which it could establish a functioning, independent Bangla Desh -- a move which would be both highly provocative and of uncertain outcome. Or it may be similar to the Algerian army based in Tunisia until 1962, i.e., intending not to fight immediately but rather to wait and take over the country when the West Pakistanis leave. It is also quite possible that decisions as to the use of this force have yet to be made. In any case, some effort has been made to screen it so as to assure its loyalty to the AL-controlled Bangla Desh government-in-exile in Calcutta.

4. The political orientation of the operational guerrillas themselves, their exact numbers, command structure, etc., are generally unknown. But Bengalis are traditionally individualistic, even anarchic in character. The insurgents probably include a number of disparate, even conflicting groups of individuals and bands who operate independently of one another. Those loyal to

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the AL may make up the largest number, but at least some of the insurgents are hard-line extremists similar to the urban guerrillas in India's state of West Bengal.

5. The Mukti Bahini have shown an increasing degree of sophistication and effectiveness against the Pakistanis, though not so much as they claim. By blowing up bridges, sabotaging ships and boats, mining roads, and derailing trains, they have badly disrupted the area's transportation system. They have assassinated a number of Peace Committee members. Striking hard at the jute industry, Pakistan's principal export earner, the Mukti Bahini's acts of sabotage and intimidation have helped to reduce output of jute products to about a quarter of the former level. Casualties have been inflicted on the Pakistani army, but we have no reliable information on how many. Our Consulate in Dacca has reported a number of explosions in that city; at one time or another the city's power system and gas supplies have been put out of action, and the lobby of the most prominent hotel destroyed by a bomb. School attendance, particularly in the universities, is virtually at an end. "Pacification" remains unrealized, though Islamabad continues to claim the situation is in hand.

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6. The relationship between the Mukti Bahini and the Indian government remains a subject of controversy. Islamabad claims that only active Indian backing and collaboration have permitted the "miscreants" to operate; that peaceful conditions and the end of the refugee flow would have been achieved if only India had closed the border, disarmed the insurgents fleeing to India, and severely restricted their activities. New Delhi replies with denials of such support, and with arguments that the 2,500 mile Indian-East Pakistani border is so long and the terrain so difficult as to make control of it impossible. New Delhi further claims that neither it nor anyone else can tell whether Bengalis in the area are from East Pakistan or from West Bengal, that the insurgency is a mass popular uprising inside East Bengal itself, and that it is unable to monitor, much less stop, the aid given the Mukti Bahini by sympathizers in India.

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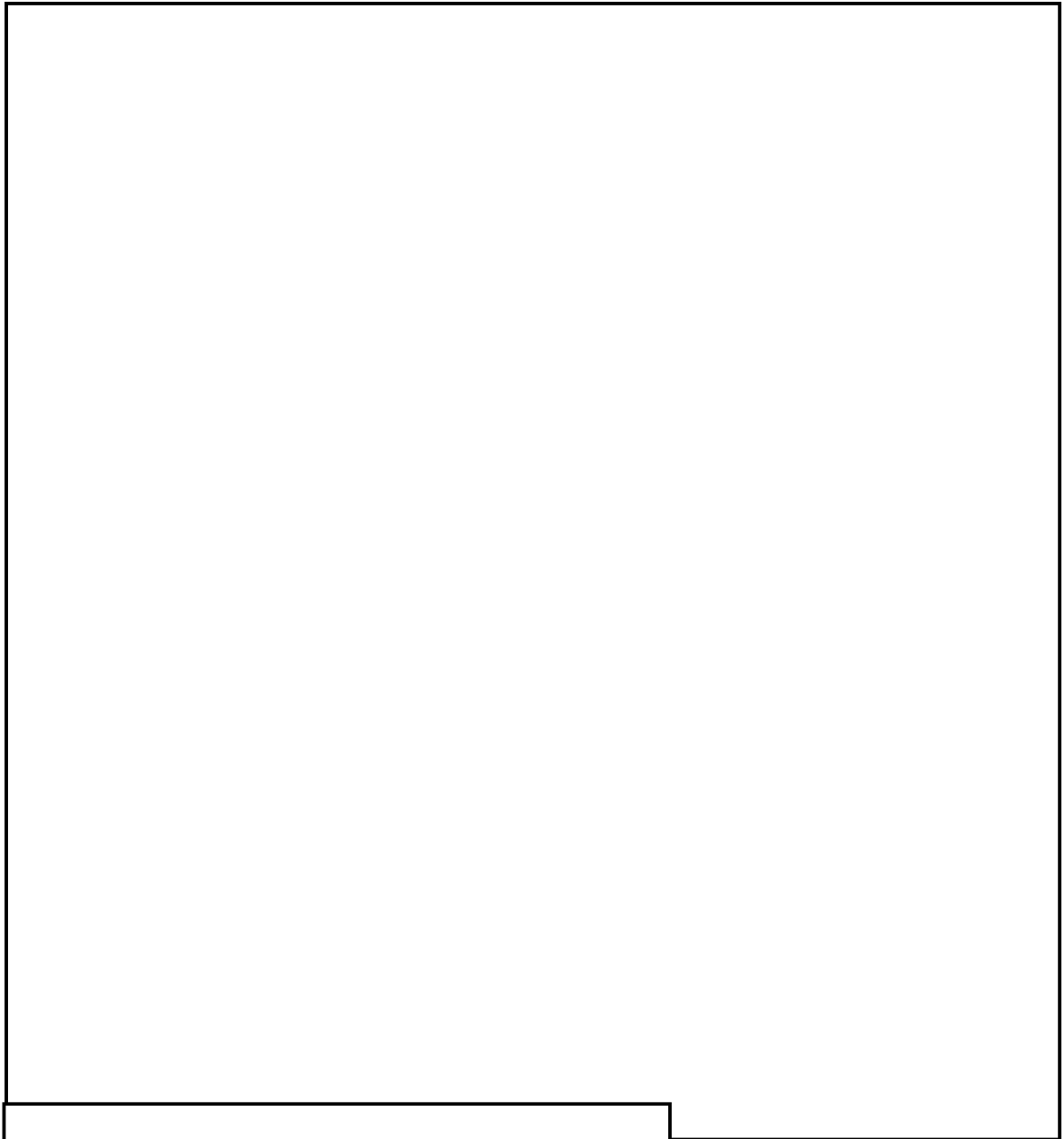
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India's state of

West Bengal has long been a hotbed of some of the most virulent

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and extreme political movements in the world, ones which have already inflicted considerable damage on that state's (and India's) urban industrial economy. Heavy repressive measures have so far kept these movements under control. The Bengalis of East Pakistan are equally susceptible to such views; if such radicals ever took over control of an independent Bangla Desh, they would pose a formidable threat to Indian security. Indeed, India is worried about the political fallout in West Bengal even now.

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The Refugees

10. The violent acts of both the Pakistani forces and the Mukti Bahini, the reprisals and counter-reprisals have inflicted grave damage on East Bengal and its people. Economic activity is now some 30-35 percent of what it was prior to March 1971, if that. Estimates (really guesses) say that some 200,000 or more residents of the area have been killed, and the area has seen one of the largest and most rapid population transfers in modern times. Since March 1971, over 8 million of the 76 million

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East Pakistanis have fled to India, and this movement continues.*
The tide ebbs and flows; since its peak rate in June when it averaged 100,000 daily, it has rarely fallen below 20,000-30,000 a day.

11. Probably 80-90 percent of those fleeing have been Hindus. It may be that the refugee flow into India will stop only when nearly all the Hindus have finally crossed the border. Some 6 million plus have already left Pakistan; the remaining 3-4 million may not be far behind. Depending on events in the area, this could occur even by the end of the year. Moreover, if East Pakistan suffers severe food shortages in the next few months, the Hindus may be joined by additional millions of Muslims.

12. Why this incredible movement of people? There are a number of reasons, but many if not most of the Hindus fled for fear of their lives. At the beginning of the civil war, General Tikka Khan -- then the Governor and Martial Law Administrator -- apparently calculated that he could intimidate his recalcitrant

* These are Indian statistics, but they are generally corroborated by outside observers, including those from the UN. In addition, the Indian government has appropriated funds to take care of this number. The Pakistanis on the other hand claim the figures are highly exaggerated, and say the total is closer to 2 million. In the following, we assume, on the basis of the best evidence now available, that the Indian figures are more likely the correct ones.

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province into quick submission. Troops mostly from the West Pakistani Punjab (an area now almost 100 percent Muslim and strongly communal in outlook) appear to have made Hindus, darkly suspected anyway of being Indian spies and secessionists, their special targets. In this virulent atmosphere, many Pakistani junior officers, enlisted men, and resident collaborators have become accustomed to mistreating the Hindu religious minority. The top leaders in Islamabad have since tried to stop these practices, but their efforts have sometimes been unavailing.

13. The Indians have accepted the refugees and have provided them with the rudiments of subsistence. They seem prepared to continue doing so, at least for the moment. From early on, they hoped that most of the heavy costs would be borne by the wealthier outside powers. To date, these hopes have been mostly unavailing; extensions of foreign assistance for the refugees have so far amounted to some \$200 million (actual deliveries have been much smaller); the total cost to India through the next six months or so may come to five times that amount. India's comparatively charitable response probably results less from altruism than from lack of alternatives. To forcibly drive the millions of refugees back across the border might result in the death of many if not most of them. If India permitted

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retaliatory actions against Muslims in India, including expelling them into Pakistan, it would risk making its 60 million Muslims fair game for Hindu fanatics (of whom there are many). Were such to happen and get out of hand, as it probably would, the present woes of East Bengal would seem small-scale.

14. In many respects the refugee problem is the principal threat to peace in the subcontinent. The sheer numbers of refugees may burden India beyond its capacity. New Delhi might then conclude that it had no choice but to invade East Pakistan either to install a government that would let the refugees return, or to seize enough Pakistani territory to resettle them. This kind of reasoning is attractive to many Indians, and pressures for an invasion will grow if the exodus continues. But this move would probably only make a bad situation worse -- and at least some prominent Indian leaders are probably aware of this. An attack on East Pakistan, with accompanying heavy fighting, movements of large armed forces, etc., would create still another group of refugees, further disrupt transport, and destroy crops and stored food in an area where the latter is already in short supply. Similarly the seizure of a Bengali area large enough to resettle several million people

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could achieve its purpose only if many present residents were expelled and made homeless themselves.

15. Most Hindu refugees now in India would probably not want to return to East Bengal under any conditions -- though India is reluctant to acknowledge this. Hindu properties have been parceled out to others, memories of atrocities remain fresh, and Hindu-Muslim antagonisms -- although now muted amongst Bengalis by common grievances against the West Pakistanis -- remain strong.* But whether these negative factors will continue to be recognized by the Indian government is another matter.

Famine in East Bengal?

16. This is still uncertain. There is still too little hard information, too few means of finding out exactly how much food, transport -- or even how many consumers -- there will be in the next few months in East Pakistan. Taking into account war conditions, flight of farmers, neglect of cultivation, and earlier natural disasters (severe floods in August 1970, the cyclone of November of that year) the production of rice, the

* Some 5 million Hindu Bengalis left East Pakistan in the 23-year period between independence and early 1971.

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area's principal food, will of course be down, though by how much is unknown. But with the flight of 10 percent of the population, and the probable availability of emergency food shipments from abroad, the situation may not assume critical proportions.

17. This may not be the case, however, for individual families, villages, or larger food deficit areas. East Pakistan's internal transportation network has been crippled, and movement of food from ports and surplus areas will be very difficult, often impossible. Much of the former local administrative and distributive apparatus has disappeared. In addition there will be continuing obstacles of political origin. Food distribution is viewed by each side as something to be used for its own advantage, or at least as something to be denied to the enemy. Thus there are reports of some members of the Pakistani army and the Peace Committees deliberately withholding food from Hindus. Some Mukti Bahini leaders for their part have threatened to attack and sabotage emergency food distribution efforts, including those of the UN, because such will be ultimately run by and for their West Pakistani oppressors. In any event, the food situation in East Bengal is likely to remain uncertain, with the potential for a disaster of major magnitude.

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Attitudes of New Delhi and Islamabad

18. The two governments continue to be hostile, self-righteous, and emotional with respect to one another. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who got a sweeping electoral mandate last spring, is clearly in charge in New Delhi. Elected on a platform promising a major effort to reduce unemployment and to raise living standards, she has been compelled instead to preoccupy herself with the Pakistani crisis. On the whole, she has been a force for moderation, resisting demands for all-out war from the xenophobic Jan Sangh party and other extremists. Her policies have so far received general public support.

19. The Pakistani military continues to rule all sections of the country through its strict Martial Law Administration (MLA). Whether President Yahya Khan is absolute boss or simply one of a number of generals ruling collectively cannot be established. In any event Yahya and the MLA show almost no signs of partisan disagreements or lack of resolve. Z.A. Bhutto, the politician who got most of the West Pakistani votes in the December 1970 elections, has so far not been permitted to take office. In his frustration he frequently lashes out at the MLA in private (and occasionally in public), but he will remain powerless so long as

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the military continues to rule. And in the present crisis atmosphere, there are few signs that the MLA will in fact renounce its authority.*

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* *The other principal Pakistani political leader, the AL's Mujibur Rahman, remains in prison. Islamabad has announced that he is being tried in camera for treason, but has not disclosed the verdict or sentence. Even so he remains overwhelmingly the most popular politician in East Bengal.*

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Islamabad unilaterally declared a six months moratorium on its foreign debt payments, saving itself \$60 million in foreign exchange. Its fairly large textile industry has lost much of its captive market in the east wing, but it apparently has been able to export its products elsewhere. At the same time, consumer imports have been cut sharply. Development spending in the east, of course, has been greatly curtailed if not ended entirely. Thanks to these steps, Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves have fallen only from \$254 million a year ago to \$217 million. Western powers have made no significant new extensions of foreign aid since March 1971, but there is still enough aid in the pipeline to last several more months, possibly longer. Pakistan's moratorium on foreign debt repayments expires in October and the government is seeking more liberal repayment terms from its creditors. If such are not forthcoming, Islamabad could then declare another moratorium and continue as before -- though this would further antagonize at least some of its foreign creditors.

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South Asia and the Outside Powers

26. Since March 1971, both India and Pakistan have, of course, sought outside backing for their respective positions, and have shown considerable concern with foreign responses to their moves. Neither country has taken its case to the UN in this dispute, probably in part because neither would be likely to get the strong endorsement of any significant group of nations there. In some cases foreign support, or lack of it, has had only marginal impact. India has been disappointed, though hardly damaged, by the support given the Pakistanis by the Arabs whom New Delhi has so long cultivated and endorsed in their dispute with Israel. Of far greater consequence has been India's failure to get all Pakistan's principal sources of economic aid to suspend their assistance pending a political solution in East Bengal. But the two South Asian countries have concentrated most of their efforts in seeking the backing, variously, of the US, the USSR, and China.

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